

WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM - TENNESSEE

October 22, 2003

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program to restore and protect wetlands on non-federal lands. It is an opportunity for private landowners, states, or non-profit groups to receive financial incentives to restore wetlands by retiring marginal agricultural land from production. Landowners may sell to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) a conservation easement (permanent or 30-year) or enter into a ten-year cost-share agreement to restore and protect wetlands. The landowner voluntarily limits future use of the land, yet retains private ownership. Because the landowner retains ownership, USDA has no authority to provide public access. The landowner and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) develop a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the wetlands.

Wetland restoration in Tennessee consists primarily of restoring bottomland hardwoods and reversing all existing in-field drainage systems. Allowances within the restoration work include the development of up to 30 percent of the easement area in native plant communities other than the original plant communities of the converted wetlands, and up to 5 percent of an easement may be established to annual food plots. Both of these variances are to be determined necessary to maximize wildlife benefits as part of the planned wetland restoration. No restoration activities are allowed to negatively impact public drainage.



(Photos Courtesy of Tennessee Partners Project)

The following is an estimate of WRP accomplishments from 1994 through fiscal year 2003:

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERMANENT EASEMENTS FUNDED	68
TOTAL NUMBER OF 30-YEAR EASEMENTS FUNDED	33
TOTAL NUMBER OF EASEMENT NOW FILED	90
TOTAL NUMBER OF EASEMENT REMAINING TO BE FILED	11
TOTAL NUMBER OF ACRES FOR FILED EASEMENTS	14,469
TOTAL NUMBER OF ACRES REMAINING TO BE FILED	2,282

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HABITAT ACRES RESTORED BY TYPE:

Emergent Fresh Marsh	1,009 Acres
Forested Wetlands	8,909 Acres
	(6,554 Acres Planted and 2,355 Acres Natural Regeneration)
Forested Riparian Buffer	196 Acres
Upland Native Grasses	117 Acres
Forested Uplands	1,614 Acres
	(1,349 Acres Planted and 265 Acres Natural Regeneration)

NUMBER OF EXISTING WETLAND ACRES FOR FILED EASEMENTS	2,549
NUMBER OF FILED EASEMENTS WITH WETLANDS FULLY RESTORED	70
NUMBER OF FILED EASEMENTS WITH PENDING RESTORATION	20
NUMBER OF WETLAND ACRES NOW FULLY RESTORED	9,918

WRP offers for fiscal year 2003 were extended to six landowners, all for permanent easements. NRCS anticipates filing easements on an estimated 1,556 acres with fiscal year 2003 applicants.

In fiscal year 2004, a total of 27 applications remain unfunded for the WRP. Tennessee currently has applications totaling about 4,500 acres with a funding need of approximately \$5,000,000.

Additional information about WRP is available from USDA Service Centers. Landowners may also sign up there. Signup is continuous, and eligible applicants are carried over each year until funded or request removal from consideration.